
Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 2, 2014

Contact: Steve Lambert, The 20/20 Network
(909) 841-7527/ steve@the2020network.com



50 Years Later, War on Poverty Remains an Uphill Battle; SCAG General Assembly to Discuss Collaborative Solutions

INDIAN WELLS – In August, 1964, President Lyndon Johnson declared a War on Poverty. A half-century later, California continues to lose ground, and elected leaders from throughout the region warn that without a collaborative commitment, the battle will be lost.

“We can’t run away from this. The problem is real, and we simply have to do a better job of making sure people have the opportunity to succeed,” said Gary Ovitt, San Bernardino County Supervisor and a member of the Southern California Association of Governments’ Regional Council.

Ovitt is one of nearly 800 leaders and policy makers gathering in Indian Wells May 1-2 for SCAG’s 2014 Regional Conference & General Assembly, which will feature, among other topics, a follow-up to SCAG’s December 2013 report on poverty.

That study showed that between 1990 and 2012, the share of residents in the six-county SCAG region who were living below the federal poverty level rose from 13 percent to 18 percent, and that today, one in every four children live in poverty.

One month after the SCAG study, the President’s Council of Economic Advisors put an exclamation mark on the problem, reporting that true “market poverty” – reflecting what the poverty rate would be without any tax credits or other benefits – has actually risen from 27 percent to 28.7 percent over the last half century.

To address the situation, Regional Conference attendees will look at ways educators, businesses and policy makers can work collaboratively to create employment opportunities.

“We need to find ways to work together and make sure our workforce has the education and technological know-how to meet the region’s future economy,” said Greg Pettis, Immediate Past President of SCAG and a Cathedral City council member.

The War on Poverty was a major initiative of the Johnson Administration, culminating in the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which was passed by Congress on Aug. 20 of that year. The EOA created the Community Action Program, Job Corps and Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), as well as the first Head Start early childhood education program.

“Education has been, and must continue to be, at the center of any real effort to eliminate poverty,” said Hasan Ikhara, Executive Director of SCAG. “With education comes the advancement opportunities needed to lift people and their families out of where they’re at.”

In addition to the Regional Conference discussions, SCAG will hold a regional poverty forum later this summer in connection with the 50th anniversary.

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About SCAG

SCAG is the nation's largest metropolitan planning organization, representing six counties, 191 cities and more than 18 million residents. SCAG undertakes a variety of planning and policy initiatives to plan for a livable and sustainable Southern California now and in the future. For more information about SCAG's regional efforts, please visit www.scag.ca.gov.